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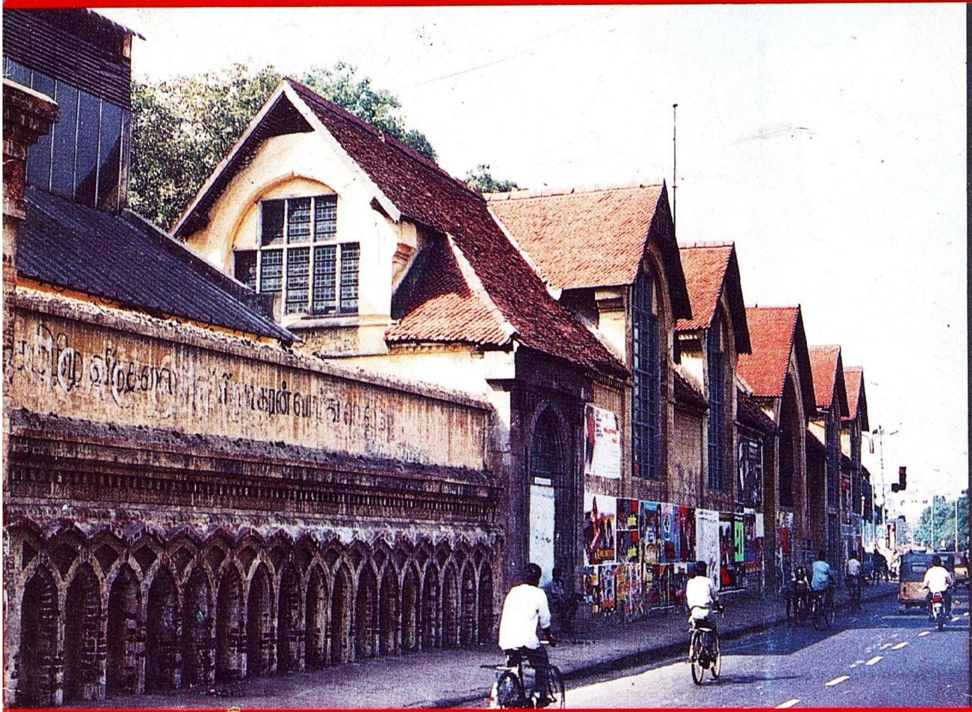

Inauguration of the

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

of Madras School of Art

1997

GOVT. COLLEGE OF ARTS & CRAFTS CHENNAI

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT :
Our sincere thanks
to the Department of
Tamil Development
And Culture, Tamilnadu.

Our grateful thanks to all
Faculty members who have helped
in setting up the Museum of
Contemporary Art.

Our thanks to those who have
generously donated original
artworks for the Museum.

TEXT BY :
Anjali Sircar

PHOTOGRAPH & DESIGN :
Vijaya Kumar
Shanmugasundaram
Balaji

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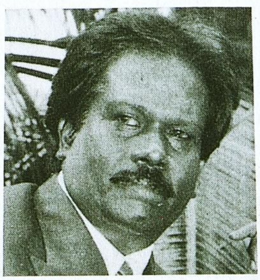
DEDICATION

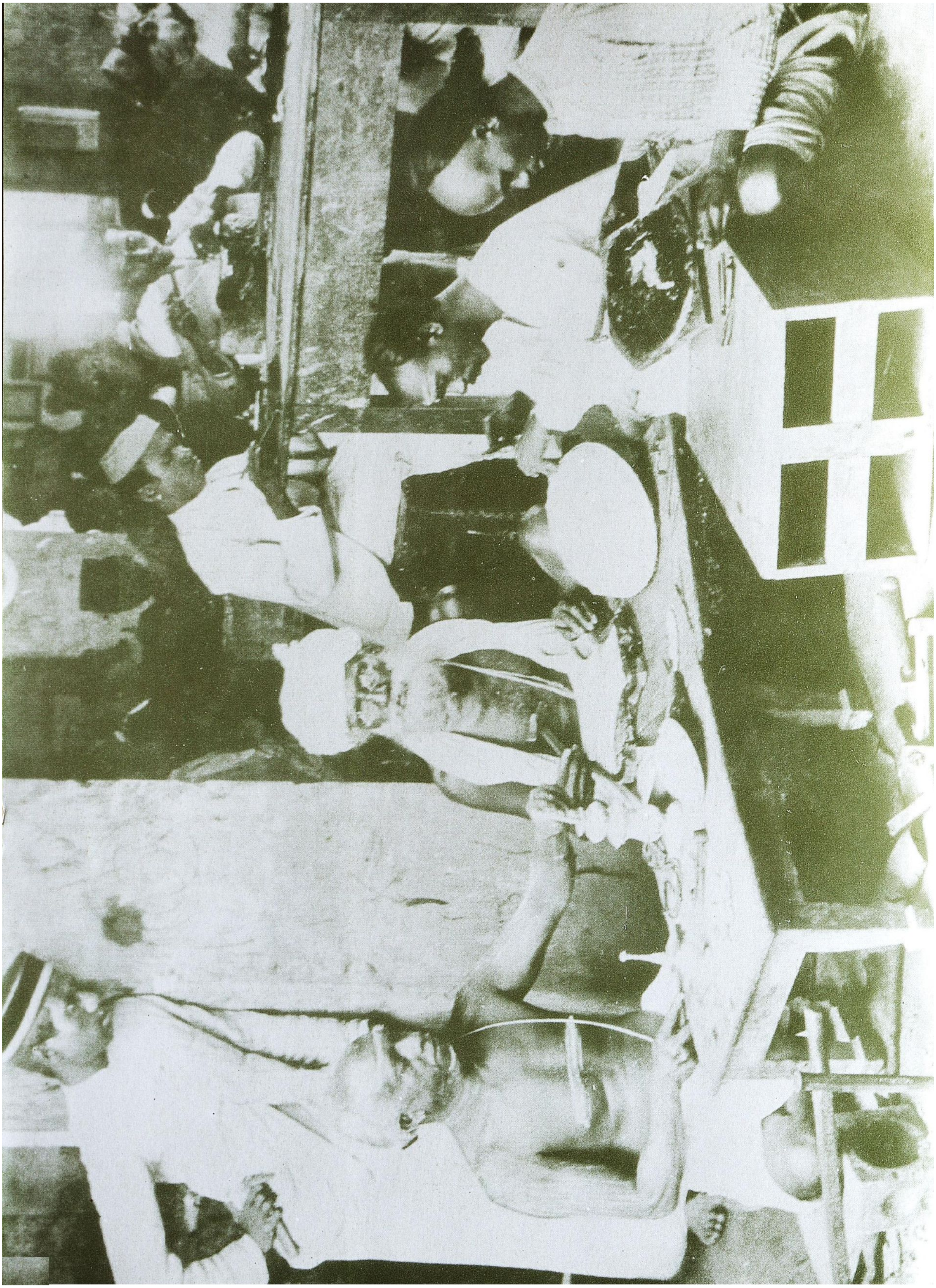
The Museum of Contemporary Art of the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Chennai, is dedicated to all those artists who stumbled upon uneven paving stones and, without any excuse, paved the way for all those who came after them, taking the responsibility for moulding their aesthetic sensibility, and through them of the society and the nation.

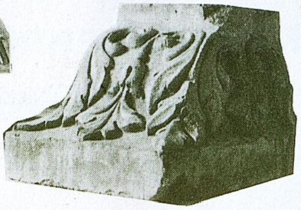
Who we are, who our heroic fathers were, how we got where we are, why we believe what we believe and act the way we do – this Treasure House of Art will illuminate these essential questions.

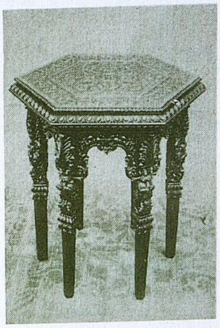
As the artists of the present renew their link with the artists of the past, the process of dream and discovery will go on to be imprinted at the destined moment on the fabric of art and life.

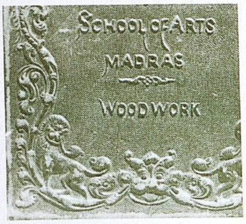


Dr. ALPHONSO ARUL DOSS
Principal
Government College of Arts & Crafts
Chennai - TAMILNADU.





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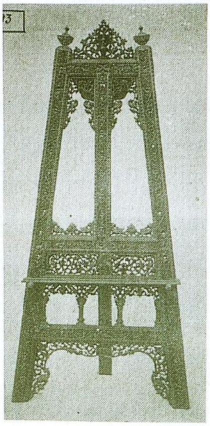

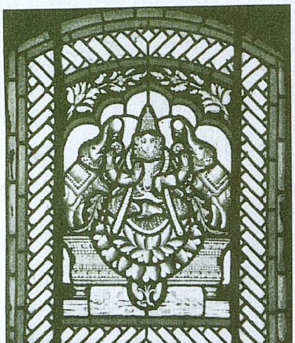

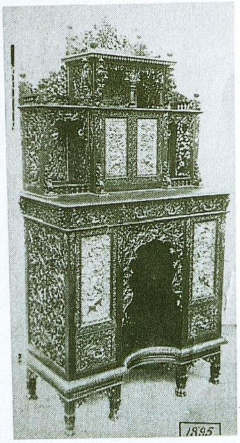
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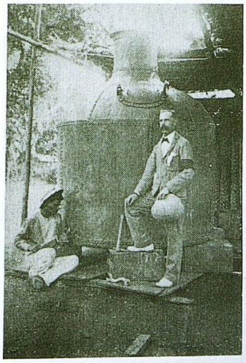
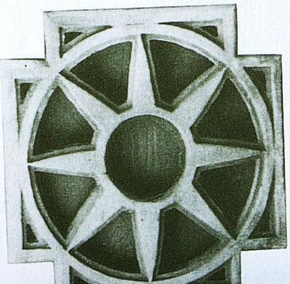




A HISTORY OF THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT COLLEGE OF ARTS AND CRAFTS

Museums, especially art museums, meet a universal need for a permanent experience with something higher, purer, more eternal and more extraordinary than home, work and the everyday world. They collect and preserve the evidence of human achievement which, along with associated ideas, add to the knowledge and understanding of man. Each museum is different with its own character, yet all of them communicate knowledge in ways that avoid controversial issues and promote belief in progress as a virtuous force.

The new Museum of Contemporary Art which is being inaugurated today, is situated within the pillared 19th century Indo-Gothic building that houses the Government College of Arts and Crafts in central Chennai. Wedged between the Institution's administrative office, the ornate library and an ancient museum facing the main thoroughfare, it makes a virtue of accommodation to its surroundings. Inside, the museum is inventive and diverse , fittingly designed for its eclectic collection of works ranging from the colonial times to post-colonial India.

The noblest period of Indian art undoubtedly belongs to the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries when it reflected both the life and ideals of men with extraordinary intimacy -- the actual as well as the dreamworld of two great Oriental cultures at the most dramatic moment of their contact -- that is Indian and Persian art. Rajput painting is the descendant of that art of tempera painting which we lose sight of at Ajanta and of the medieval work of which little trace remains. Mughal painting, though built up with the materials of many different traditions, is almost undeniably original -- in the same sense that the Mughal culture in India is as a whole original.

In the 19th century, the traditions of Mughal and Rajput painting may be said to have finally disappeared, largely as a result of the change of taste produced by English education in India. The fact that Indian art had been entirely ignored by the Anglo-Indian scheme of things tended to hasten the decay of art, and this in turn led the English-educated Indians to regard it with indifference and contempt. Collection of European pictures became one of the amusements of Indian aristocracy which neither promoted art nor the quality of life. It was merely a competition in ostentation and self-indulgence.

At a point when thousands of Indian craftshops had collapsed due to lack of State and public patronage on one hand and the import of machine-made goods on the other, rendering artisans and craftworkers all over the country unemployed, different groups of artists in London represented to the British authorities that art schools should be set up in India to reverse this trend. Of course they had the model of Marlborough House in mind and wrote: "There is a peculiar call upon us to give the Indians all the advantages in the cultivation of the arts which is in our power to give, for in order to favour our own manufactures imported into India and partly by levying a heavy duty upon Indian manufactures imported into England, we have swept away great branches of manufacture and have caused great distress in India. Consequently, we owe a heavy debt in India in this respect and it is especially our duty to give our Indian fellow-subjects every possible aid in cultivating these branches of art that still remain to them".

Of the Schools of Art, the oldest was that founded at Madras in 1850 by Dr. Alexander Hunter M.D., F.R.S.C.E., an eminent surgeon in the British military service, followed by similar schools about the same time in Bombay and Calcutta, and in Lahore in 1875. Contemporary British opinion had little or no sympathy with India's own fine art traditions, so the schools aimed to inculcate the Victorian taste for art in the students. At the same time, their practical purpose was to provide a new generation with useful and employable skills in the industrial ornamental arts.

The Madras School of Arts was started in Pophams, Broadway, in May 1850 but within a year it was found that students were becoming more adept at rudiments of imitation than original work and hybrid patterns were superseding traditional Indian designs. There was a dearth of good teachers as well as of informed lessons and in 1852, the School was taken over by the Department of Public Instruction. Dr. Alexander Hunter determinedly set himself to the task of reorganising the school curriculum. In consultation with the East India House and the Royal Academy in London, he set up an eight-member committee to decide upon the future course of study in the School as also the management. As a result, the Madras School was converted into the Government School of Industrial Arts consisting of two departments -- the Artistic and the Industrial. Students now branched off in specific directions -- one group towards architecture, pottery, copper-engraving, woodcuts, botanical and anatomical drawings and maps and diagrams while others towards manufacture of a variety of machine tools and apparatuses, building, ventilating and draining materials, bricks and firebricks for hospitals, barracks and

bullet factories, porous cells for telegraphic purposes and perforated ornamental and balustrade tiles for verandahs, windows and gardens.

Dr. Hunter, who took full charge of the Government School of Industrial Arts in 1855, decided to include photography as a subject in the art course. Photographs were taken of the hill tribes of the Nilgiris, pagodas and monuments in the Madras Presidency as also of the guns and other antique curios in the arsenal of Fort St. George, for the purposes of record and exhibition. The photographic work of the School aroused great interest as proved by the request of the Asiatic Societies in Calcutta and Bombay for copies of the tribal pictures and a subsequent important assignment by art historian James Fergusson for photographs of "the very fine antiquities of two pagodas near Tadputtree in the Ceded districts" for illustrating his book on Indian architecture. "The ornaments on these buildings are in a very fine rich style of Hindoo art, and from having been carved in stone, they are very sharp and in fine preservation," Fergusson is stated to have observed. An additional purpose was to include these photographs in the collection of the Kensington School of Design, London.

In its sixteenth year in 1868, the Government of Industrial Arts had taught about 3,500 students and found placement for about 2,000 of them all over india as also in Canada, Australia, the Andamans and England. It sent out teachers to the art schools in Calcutta, Jeypore, Travancore, Mysore and Ceylon and was ready to assist in the setting up of art schools in Lucknow, Roorke, Surat, Poona, Agra, Lahore and Assam. In a touching letter to colleague and friend Dr. Norman Macleod in London, Dr. Hunter wrote: "I have lived to see both art and industry recognised in India as civilizing agencies and God has blessed us and given us a lever by which I beleive that India may hereafter be raised in the scale of civilization. We look to you and other friends in England to help in this cause".

In his review of the activities of the Government School of Industrial Arts sent to the Director of Public Instruction in 1860, Dr. Alexander Hunter reported the setting up by one E. Midford of a manufactory for bricks, pipes and tiles on Poonamallee Road for which machinery worth Rs. 7,000 had arrived from England. While Europeans were in charge of production, Dr. Hunter sent trained workmen from his School to assist them and also lent machine tools and appliances as work commenced. It is presumed that

this manufacturing unit is the nucleus around which eventually grew the present College of Arts and Crafts which stands on a sprawling four-acre campus with its courtyards, pitched roofs, long arched windows and vast expenses of greenery.

The Government School of Industrial Arts had two more British Supterintendents R. F. Chisholm and W.S. Hadaway, but it was E.B. Havell, British art teacher and critic, who arrived in India in 1884 as the Principal of the Madras School of Arts and crafts, made a great impact by his vindication of the beauty of Indian art and the great ideals it had inspired. Though his name is not writ large in the annals of the British Raj, it is mainly as the inspirer and guiding spirit of Indian renaissance that he is going to be remembered by posterity. Sir William Rothenstein of the Royal college of Art told him: "Whenever I speak of Indian art, I say that you were before us all in understanding its qualities".

One of his official predecessors at the Madras School of Arts and Crafts cautioned him before he left for India that he would find Madras artistically "a desert". But his experience was something quite different, which he put on record in his book" The Basis for Artistic and Industrial Revival in India". "When I came to Madras and wanted to strengthen the crafts section, I had no difficulty in finding within a very short time three exceedingly fine Madras Craftsmen to place them in charge of three departments of craft-teaching. One was a skilled woodcarver from Ramnad, another a temple metal worker– a sthapati from Kumbakonam, and the third a goldsmith from the Vizagapatam district. All three were not only fine craftsmen and designers who could have commanded very high wages in London and Paris,but they were excellent teachers knowing their Shilpashastras, and artists who were perfectly well able to adapt their designs to any new idea I suggested to them. It was a real delight to work with such craftsmen." Havell was not only responsible for the introduction of wood carving, carpentry and metalwork units in the school, he also espoused the cause of handloom weaving and the need to preserve traditional architecture.

He put forth certain practical propositions for the revival of Indian art and architecture: 1) That every Indian who built a house or palace, must honour Indian art by employing Indian master builders who had the knowledge of Indian architectural traditions contained in the Shilpashastras, 2) that all furniture and decorations made for Indian houses, even chairs and similar furniture of European origin, be made distinctly Indian in design,

3) that the great events of India's national history and moral teaching of the national epics be impressed strongly in the minds of the children by certain concrete images painted on the walls of the school and municipal buildings by Indian artists with Indian colours and in the Indian way of artistic expression and 4) that the rich men of India take an intelligent interest in art, not by collecting European pictures but by taking care of the masterpieces of Indian art by reviving the old "chitrashalas" in which Indian subjects had been painted on the walls by Indian artists.

Havell indicated with some regret that when he left Madras in 1896 to take over as Principal of the Calcutta School of Art, it was thought desirable to convert the Madras School "into a manufactory for aluminium cooking pots" and Indian art again became invisible to official eyes. This must have been an intermediate phase for on reaching Calcutta, Havell found himself in the midst of a new resurgence spearheaded by the Tagore family. The co-operation of two differently gifted men -- Havell and Abanindranath Tagore, a painter of great promise -- made possible a change in the public attitude art and the wings of change did not take much time to reach the Madras School which rapidly soaked in new ideas about painting, sculpture, drawing and craftsmaking.

When the Madras School came under the jurisdiction of the Director of Industries and Commerce, Rao Bahadur N.R. Balakrishna Mudaliar became its first Indian Superintendent in 1927, though his connection with the School went back to the year 1889. There is no written history about his contribution to the development of the school, but an inscription under a bust of Balakrishna Mudaliar cast by M.S.Nagappa and unveiled by Hon'ble Hopetoon Gabrial Stokes in 1933 speaks eloquently about his services: "Erected by Principal D.P. Roy Chowdhury at the unanimous wish of the whole school staff in appreciation of his honest, sincere and faithful connection with the School for over forty years from 1889 to 1930."

Thirty-year-old D.P. Roy Chowdhury, student of Abanindranath Tagore, took over as the first Indian Principal of the Madras School of Arts and Crafts in 1929 on an invitation from the Madras Government under Viscount Goschen. Abani Tagore's art was one of assimilation, a harmonious synthesis of what was best in the arts of India, Persia, Japan and China, but Roy Chowdhury surpassed the master by creating a virile art which worked as a corrective to the weak, effiminate character that was

slowly creeping into modern painting in the name of idealized form and subjective art. He thus appeared on the art scene as a reformer -- "the classic of the new generation of Indian artists" -- and went forth to found a great new school of art -- that has come to be known as "The Madras School". The Government School of Arts and Crafts was so far limited to producing drawing teachers and craft-oriented items for the use of the Britishers. Under his guidance, the School stopped being an institution for training and turned into a school of artists.

His art was admittedly non-conformist in character, and it is the non-conformist element in him that made him a remarkable teacher. He allowed his students immense freedom of work thereby releasing the creative impulse in them and leading them ultimately to their distinctive achievements.

K.C.S. Paniker, one of his outstanding students, succeeded him as Principal in 1957 and it was during his tenure that the Madras School of Arts and Crafts was upgraded into a College in 1961. Paniker's achievement lay in the fact that he carried forward the spirit of India in a modern form.

As the areas of learning and experimentation by students of the Government College of Arts and Crafts widened, the Department of Technical Education stepped into the scene with plans to upgrade the various courses of study upto the degree level -- a scheme that fructified only in 1979. The Government of TamilNadu also created a Department of Culture with the specific idea of patronage and guidance in the field of visual and plastic arts and brought the College under its purview in 1991. In 1994, the College became an autonomous institution, marking an important milestone in its growth and development.

The earliest citadel of art education in India, the Government College of Arts and Crafts has nurtured the South indian art movement through times which have often not been congenial, yet it really never lost its vitality -- a message that has been carried forth by several generations of talented artists spread all over the country and the world.

- ANJALI SIRCAR

D. P. ROY CHOWDHURY

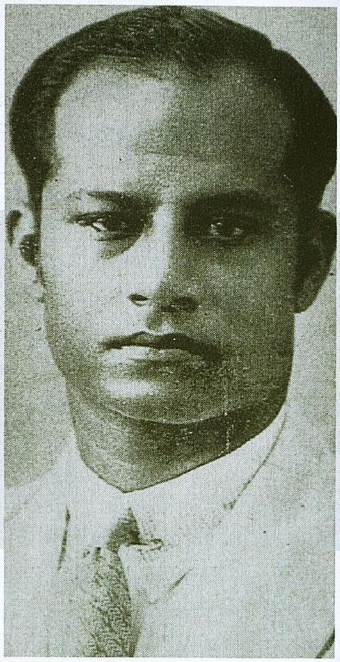
While on the quest for fresh fields for his artistic endeavours, DEVI PRASAD ROY CHOWDHURY, a student of Abanindranath Tagore, received an invitation from the Government of Madras to take charge of the School of Arts and Crafts as its Principal.

In 1929, at the age of the thirty, Roy Chowdhury joined the School as its first Indian Principal, and the next thirty years that he spent in Madras were the most fruitful period of his life as painter and sculptor. He was a wizard of the water colour and his mastery of the medium is unequalled in the country. He always preferred water colours to oil, being able to impart the depth and solidity of oils to the water colours without the heaviness of the former. In this treatment he appears to have been influenced by Rembrandt, particularly in his emphasis on chiaroscuro. His tendency in later years was for a more realistic yet highly creative form of art and this resulted in his painting a series of magnificent landscapes and studies of Nature.

However, it is as a sculptor that Roy Chowdhury excelled, is known and venerated today. For originality, individuality, strength and expressiveness, his sculptural works are easily the best in the country. Even the Rodinesque touch which characterised some of his earlier studies, is perhaps superficial -- Roy Chowdhury's art is definitely and distinctly his own.

No less gifted was he as a portraitist. His portraits are magnificent pictures in the best English, Dutch, Italian and French traditions. They are historical records.

Devi Prasad Roy Chowdhury has been criticized by historians for the reason that his work was very much in the nature of illustration and had very little spiritual content. Roy Chowdhury was neither spiritual, nor high-bowed, nor an intellectual. He was a



down-to-earth man, elemental and rugged, inspired by life and capturing its essence in his work. He went through life with a native aristocratic nonchalance and whatever he took from life, he gave back in the shape of his art.

BIO - DATA :

Born 1899 in Tejhat, East Bengal, Devi Prasad Roy Chowdhury spent his childhood in the village. He went to Calcutta for higher studies where his father Uma Prasad Roy Chowdhury took him to Abanindranath Tagore for art lessons. He also received training from Signor Boiess, an Italian painter from whom he learnt life drawing and portraiture in western technique. After a few struggling years as a freelance artist, he gained recognition and was awarded medals and prizes in various exhibitions.

He produced some of his outstanding paintings and sculptures as the Principal of the Government School of Arts and Crafts and in 1953 was awarded an MBE by the British Government for his merit and contribution to art. He was the first Chairman of the Lalit Kala Akademi and was decorated with Padma Bhushan by the Union Government of India.

His works are included in the collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad and various museums abroad.

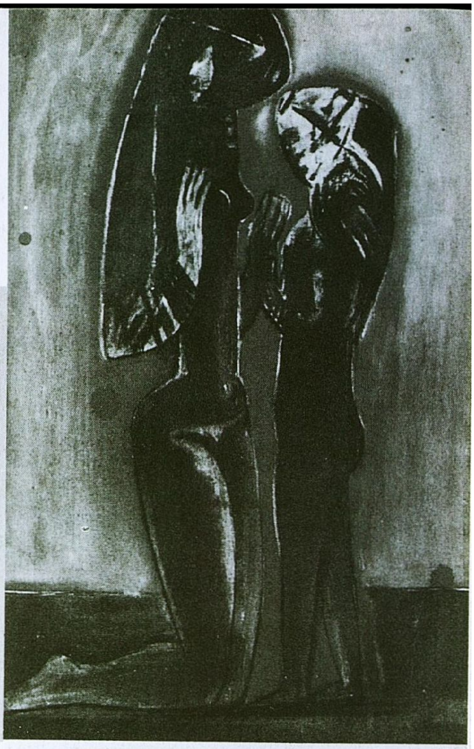
K.C.S. PANIKER

K.C.S. PANIKER, who became Vice - Principal of the Madras College of Arts and Crafts during the time of Devi Prasad Roy Chowdhury, was appointed Principal of the College in 1957.

Paniker's attempt as a painter was to achieve a more contemporary approach to figure and design. He brought a non-intellectual understanding to the concept of reality in art and translated his own reactions into bold and valid terms of form and colour. He was one of the few Indian painters who went through the ordeal of western teaching and came out of it unscathed. His paintings were not translations from the French, nor were they enlarged Indian miniatures. They were as enlightened as anything done by younger European painters and at the same time truely Indian.

Some might regret that in his later years , Paniker was no longer concerned with achieving those symphonies in colour, where a single triumphant note blended with many harmonies of minor tones, possessed the entire space of the picture. But what Paniker was aiming at was simplification of the form through subordination of colour and elimination of standardized figure and space. He spelt out his forms in anecdotal passages of script in large but subtle designs, in the way it is managed in an epic.

Before long, Paniker proclaimed his art as "Indian in spirit and worldwide contemporary" and unlocked the doors of an entire school of abstraction. He, however, pointed out to the art world that abstraction was not the prerogative of the west -- the painters of Ajanta or the sculptors of Pattadakal understood it -- and that it was important to be true to the spirit and earth of India, whatever be the technique. He was also responsible for



releasing the genius of craft into the spirit of art, closing the distinction between the two which the British rulers had fully exploited.

BIO-DATA :

Born in Coimbatore in 1911, K.C.S. Paniker had his early education in Kerala and later joined the Madras Christian College where he was influenced by the work of John Sell Cotman, a contemporary of Turner. He joined the Madras School of Arts and Crafts under D.P. Roy Chowdhury in 1936 and proved his talent within two years by winning the award for the best watercolour of the year given by the Calcutta Academy of Fine Arts. He exhibited with great success at several all-India shows and during his travel in Europe, exhibited in London and Paris. He was nominated as an Eminent member of the Lalit Kala Akademi in 1954 and became Principal of the College of Arts and Crafts in 1957. His works are included in the National Art Gallery, Madras, the National Callery of Modern Art, New Delhi and several other private and public collections in the country and abroad.

On the occasion of the inauguration of
the Museum of Contemporary Art,
The College of Arts and Crafts, Government of Madras,
takes pride in honouring five
eminent artists and educationists
who selflessly served the institution.

Prof. S. DHANAPAL

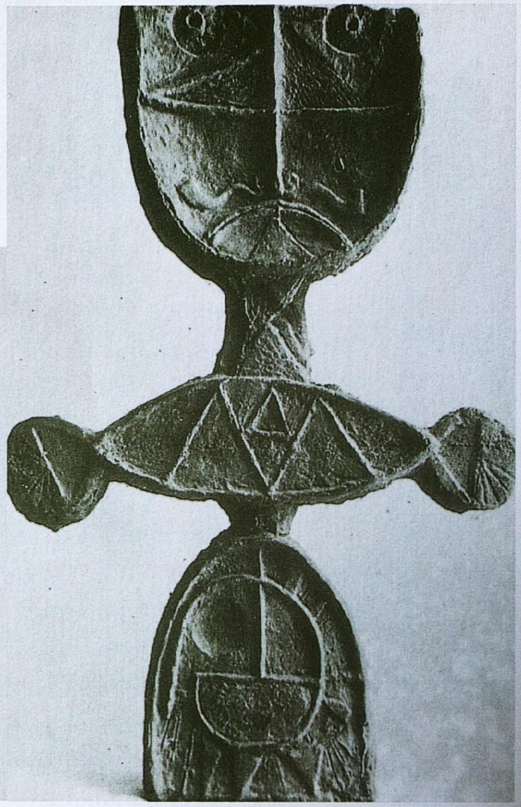
Prof. R. KRISHNA RAO

Prof. L. MUNUSWAMY

Prof. A.P. SANTHANARAJ

Prof. C.J. ANTHONY DOSS

S. DHANAPAL



Among the many fine sculptors South India has produced, none is truly more Indian than S. Dhanapal. Born in Madras in 1919, he studied art under Devi Prasad Roy Chowdhury. Though he excelled in line drawing and impressionistic water colour studies, in time he left these behind to recognise his true love in sculpture.

He carefully studied Indian sculpture and found that the essence of Indianness lay hidden in the arrangement of the subject, the distribution of space, the rhythm of form, the expression of the shape and its simplification. He made a closer study of the Chola and Pallava sculptures and the sculptures of Mathura and found that the Indian head studies were far superior to those done by the sculptors of the European school. The treatment of volume and the directness of expression were unique. He began breathing the Indian environment and developed a style totally rooted in the soil.

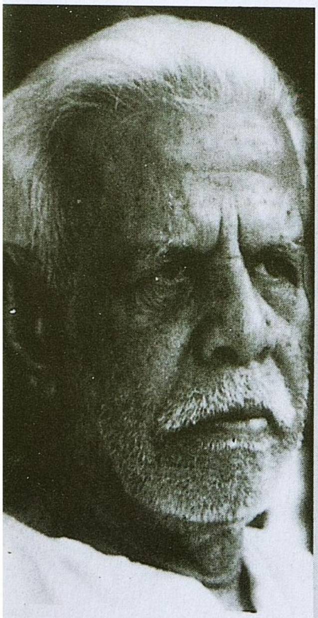
He became Principal of the Government College of Arts and Crafts in 1972, introduced various metals, terra cotta and wood into sculpture and created a casting section where students could experiment in any medium they wanted. He looked for genuine talent in students and inspired them with his power of draughtsmanship and total command of the medium.

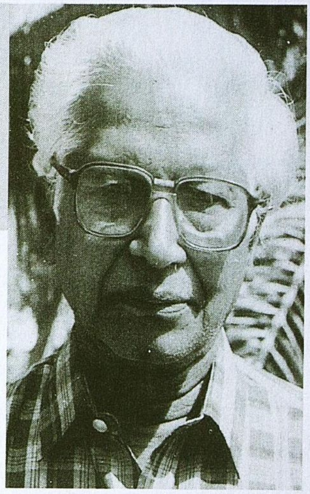
Many of Dhanapal's students are among today's eminent painters and sculptors who have achieved distinction at home and abroad and brought him credit as a teacher.

R. KRISHNA RAO

R. Krishna Rao, as an art student, was caught up between the pre-war philosophy of war and the post-war awakening in the field of aesthetics. It was a serious problem for artists like him to fit into the situation. By early sixties, however, he had made his mark on the Indian art scene by painting traditional subjects in a contemporary style. He picked up his themes from the epics, mythology and Christianity and the pattern of his paintings was sustained by a pictorial order that consisted of breaks and curves and dots and marks that created the desired effect.

He successfully designed the temple tower motif as the monogram of the Tamil Nadu Government and created a great impact by his architectural paintings inspired by the temples of Madurai. Born in Madurai in 1916, he was fascinated by the city. He spent hours and days in and around the crumbling ruins of palaces, studying and sketchings them and capturing the romance of the past in the midst of a new environment. His works were acquired by the Akademis in New Delhi and Tamilnadu and some of them went into private collections. He was appointed Principal of the Government College of Arts and Crafts in 1968.

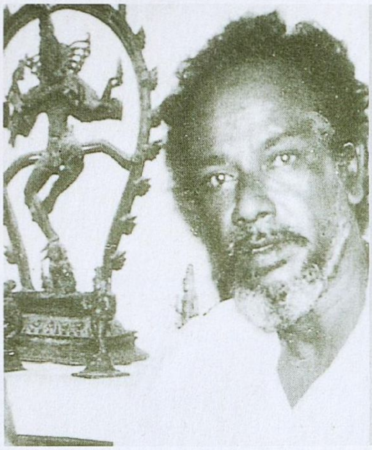




L. MUNUSWAMY

Born in Madras in 1927, L. Munusamy's life as an artist was moulded by two great teachers K.C.S Paniker and S. Dhanapal. The quality of Munuswamy's work lies in the spontaneity of his line drawing which has survived all experimentation and become the basic style of his art. During his most impressionable period as a student, Munuswamy sketched endlessly from life -- people, streets, market places, festival scenes and land and seascapes -- and the need to capture the details of a moving life set his style. Utilising his latent talent of eliminating trivial details from the theme and using colour only when needed, he achieved the triple quality of austerity, directness and naturalness in his work.

After receiving his diploma in painting, he went for advanced study in painting with a National scholarship and later studied graphic design in England under the Colombo Plan in 1963-64. He has widely exhibited in India and abroad and his works, apart from being awarded, remain in outstanding collections including that of the National Gallery of Modern Art and the Gandhi Museum. After being on the Faculty of the Government College of Arts and Crafts for several years, he was appointed Principal of the institution in 1971.



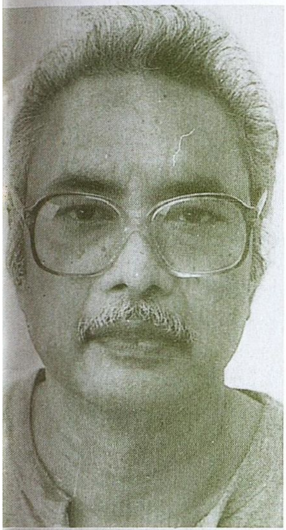
A.P. SANTHANARAJ

Schooled like many artists of his generation in the academic style of drawing, A.P. Santhanaraj, born in Tiruvannamalai in 1932, came under the powerful influence of Devi Prasad Roy Chowdhury, first as a student and later as a teacher. His preoccupation with the mastery of drawing was also a test of his own ability to build up and acceptable medium of expression.

For one and a half decades, he convincingly proved that one needed to possess intellectual knowledge of the plastic art for perfection in drawing. And once this phase was over, he travelled beyond the realm of black and white drawing towards colour -- towards a deliberate understanding of all the elements which would directly or indirectly sustain his concept of drawing. Colours taught him that drawing was an illusion and this magnificent realisation constituted the second phase of his career as an artist.

"Colour," to Santhanaraj "is very life". "Because colour is light, colour is something I would like to live with." The day he is convinced that he has succeeded in capturing (or converting) light into colour he would have reached his final goal. Though Santhanaraj was recognised as an excellent draughtsman and a painter of immense possibility from his early days, he deliberately shunned galleries and exhibitions which has made him more fascinating and sought after as an artist. He was Principal of the Government College of Arts and Crafts between 1987 and 1990.

C.J. ANTHONY DOSS

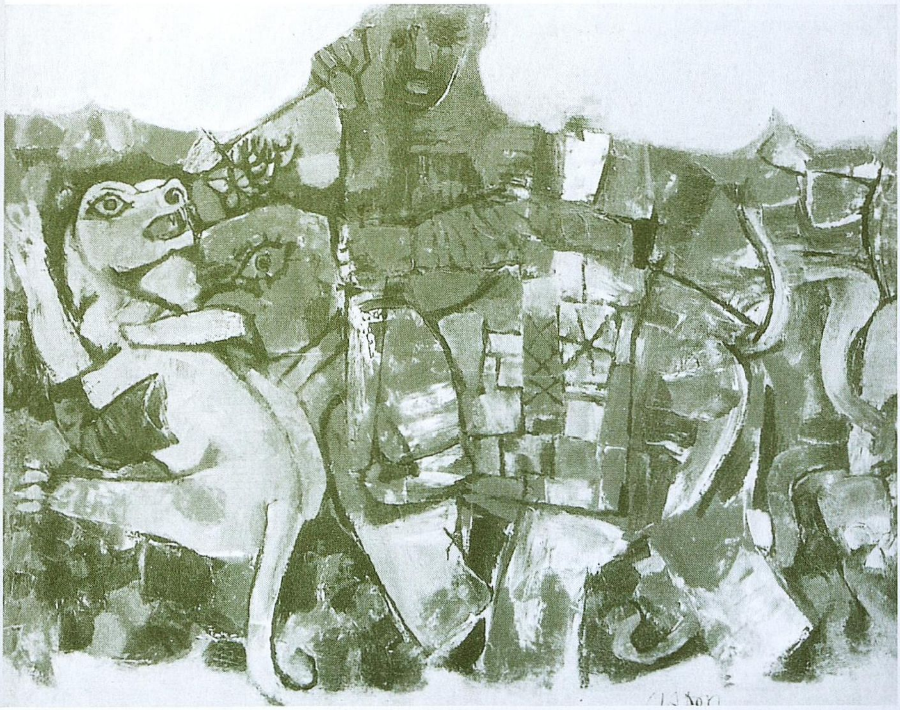


Few of Anthony Doss's contemporaries have achieved recognition in the way it has come to him. His paintings have been sold before they have left the studio, and his works have been a major influence on the work of a number of younger artists.

At the time Anthony Doss was learning art at the College of Arts and Crafts, draughtsmanship had already become an instrument of full expression to which had been added the significance of the masses of light and shade. Anthony Doss developed an interest in Western classicism and was attracted by the great Western masters -- Rubens and Rembrandt. While under the spell of Rubens, all his works amounted to a frank and manly statement of the pleasure that physical beauty brought to him, he took from Rembrandt his method of pictorial expression which was his great contribution to art.

While translating the qualities of the old masters as also his own teachers who gave him their best, into his own art, Anthony Doss specialised in portrait painting and composition. His portraits of Jesus and Madonna which come back again and again on his canvases are pirctorial representations of an experience which is profoundly moving.

The 1933-born artist has participated in important exhibitions in India and abroad, has been awarded by reputed art institutions for his distinctive work, is widely collected and was appointed Principal of the Government College of Arts and Crafts in 1990.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR...
Anjali Sircar, author and journalist, has been associated with the modern art movement in India for over three decades.

Born in 1935, and daughter of noted journalist and nationalist Sashibhusan Sengupta, founder of India's first national agency, the United Press of India, Anjali Sircar graduated from the University of Madras and studied journalism in Calcutta.

She has international awards to her credit for excellence in writing. She has received the Best Art Critic's Award of the Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi, Lifetime Achievement Award of the All India Bengali Literary Society, New Delhi and the Kalai Chemmal Award of the Tamilnadu Kuzhu, Chennai.

Her monograph on L. Munuswamy has been published by the Central Lalit Kala Academy in both English and Hindi and a book on S. Dhanapal and Five Eminent Artists of South India by the South Indian Society of Painters.

She writes an art column for the national English daily "The Hindu", through which she has focussed attention on the remarkable growth of the contemporary art movement.

Her major interest is in Fine Arts. She lives in Madras.